

KEYNOTE
COLORADO COLLEGE STATE OF THE ROCKIES PROJECT: CONSERVATION IN THE WEST POLL
February 20, 2020

Thank you, Dr. McKendry, for the kind introduction. I'm thrilled to be here.

Colorado College is a great institution. Set in a beautiful place, with Pike's Peak in your backyard. I won't embarrass anyone in particular, but some of my friends and family are students here, and I hear great things about their experience.

It's a real treat for me to see so many young people engaged in the fight for conservation – and against climate change.

I see a different audience than the one I have for a Senate floor speech, I'll tell you that. In a very good way.

And I'm so glad to be out West – because for me, the West is home.

My family homesteaded in the West almost 180 years ago. We have roots in Utah, Arizona, my home state of New Mexico, and here in Colorado.

Westerners have a special connection to the land – our thousands of acres of gorgeous, untamed beauty. Sixty-mile vistas. Snow-covered, rugged mountains. Alpine lakes and mountain streams. And abundant wildlife.

The great western writer Wallace Stegner called the West “the geography of hope.” It sure is for me.

The wild beauty of the West will always inspire me. And inspire my public service. And it is probably one of the biggest reasons I am in public service.

As some of you know, the Udall family has been working for a long time to protect the beauty and grandeur of the West:

- My uncle Mo served as Chair of the House Interior Committee for many years;
- My cousin Mark, served as Senator from this great state; and is now fighting to protect the Grand Canyon, Bears Ears, and other special places.
- My cousin Brad works on water and climate change out of Colorado State University.
- And my father Stewart Udall was Secretary of Interior under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson;

Just last month, we marked what would have been my father's 100th birthday.

As I've been reflecting on my dad's legacy, it's become clear to me just how much we can – and must – learn from his vision.

During my father's first year as Secretary of the Interior, the head of the Bureau of Reclamation flew him over southern Utah to show him the site for "next" big dam.

My dad took one look at the red rock spires below and didn't see a dam. He saw the next national park – and he went back to Washington and helped create Canyonlands National Park.

In 1963 – 57 years ago – my dad warned the nation about what he dubbed *The Quiet Crisis*.

He saw the creeping destruction of nature, and wrote that: "Each generation has its own rendezvous with the land, for despite our fee titles and claims of ownership, we are all brief tenants on this planet. By choice, or by default, we will carve out a land legacy for our heirs."

Along with scientists like his friend Rachel Carson, my dad called on the nation to act with urgency. And then the strangest thing happened: the nation actually acted.

In the 1960s, policymakers enacted many of our nation's bedrock conservation laws, and preserved millions of acres of wild places.

It's hard to imagine – in this day of bitter partisanship over environmental issues – but in the 1960's and into the '70's, Congress passed these groundbreaking laws on a strong bipartisan basis.

And they did it during the era of big dams and economic development at any cost. When conservation and environmental protection were afterthoughts – at best.

Now I didn't come here to talk about how great my dad was — he wouldn't have wanted that.

He would have wanted us to get to work on the problems at hand.

And indeed, we have got our work cut out for us. Because the world is facing a grave nature crisis – the first major challenge that I'll talk to you about today.

Wildlife has never been in greater danger. Here in the West, and across the nation and the world, we are losing species and habitat at unprecedented rates in human history.

Since 1970, in North America, we've lost 3 billion birds. In the U.S., a recent study found that we lose a football field's worth of habitat every 30 seconds.

A comprehensive U.N. biodiversity study found that one million species risk extinction. A sixth mass extinction is upon us . . . and it will accelerate, unless we act to preserve space for nature.

In the West, wildlife is at risk. The iconic plains bison survived the Ice Age, but it may not survive the age of humans. Plains bison once numbered 30 to 60 million in North America. Now - 20,000. Native Americans are nurturing the bison back, but it is an uphill battle.

The once ubiquitous Monarch butterfly – found in all 8 Western poll states – is in jeopardy. Populations of other pollinators like bees are crashing.

Human existence depends on biodiversity. At least 40 percent of the world's economy is based on biological resources. Biodiversity gives us food, shelter, medicine, economic development. Life itself.

As my father said, “Plans to protect air and water, wilderness and wildlife are in fact plans to protect” human beings.

This nature crisis is inextricably linked to the second major challenge our planet is facing: the climate crisis. Because:

- Climate change destroys habitat and the conditions necessary for healthy ecosystems.
- And the fragmentation of habitat makes it harder for wildlife to adapt to a changing climate.
- Meanwhile, the destruction of forests and natural lands both creates greenhouse gasses and reduces absorption of carbon dioxide.

I don't have to explain what climate change is doing to the West. Water scarcity. Out of control wildfires. Pollution from fossil fuel production.

These dual climate and nature crises are upon us. They are calling out for us to act with common purpose.

Yet – the President – who is down the road from us tonight – isn't listening.

He's rolled back almost every effort we have to fight climate change and save nature.

He's withdrawn from the Paris Agreement. He's eliminated the Clean Power Plan. He's trying to subsidize uneconomic coal plants.

His administration has significantly weakened the Endangered Species Act by rule. They've eviscerated Clean Water Act protections.

They are taking a hatchet to some of our most precious public lands — with an unprecedented rollback of the Grand Staircase and Bears Ears National Monuments.

The list is seemingly never-ending.

It's no exaggeration — just fact — that the Trump administration has the worst environmental record in history.

That's all true. And yet, I'm not here to make you depressed. I'm here to get you fired up.

One of the most valuable lessons my father taught me was to learn from history. Because everything we do, every step we take, is building on those who came before us.

In my father's era, Lake Erie and the Cuyahoga River were on fire. The bald eagle was going extinct. Cities were clogged with smog. Factories dumped toxins in rivers without limit.

And economic growth and "progress" was all most people cared about.

The leaders of the environmental movement 50 years ago met the challenges of their times.

Now, we must meet the challenges of ours.

Because the "quiet crisis" my father wrote about is quiet no more.

The crisis of nature and the crisis of climate change have risen to a crescendo — and the public is ready for action. We must write a new playbook to save our planet, and our way of life.

Here's the good news: I'm here to tell you we can do it. Because a movement is building — and it starts right here in the West.

The West has changed immensely over the years. Our economies have grown and diversified. Our cities have skylines. We have become much more diverse.

The West has evolved. We've moved forward.

And so has public opinion — especially on environmental issues.

The people are demanding action. And that's why I am confident we can meet the challenges before us. Just like my father's generation did.

Here are some of the numbers that struck me from the 10th Conservation in the West Poll:

- Two-thirds of Westerners think climate change is a serious problem. That's up 11 percent in 10 years.
- Three-quarters want their members of Congress and governors to have a plan to reduce carbon pollution. Including a majority of Republicans.
- 77 percent consider habitat loss for fish and wildlife to be a serious problem.
- And 76 percent support protecting wildlife corridors on public lands.

Democrats, Republicans, and independents share these views. Despite what you see coming out of Washington, there is opportunity for fashioning consensus-based solutions.

It is beyond clear that the administration's roll back of all-things-environmental is wildly unpopular in the West.

And here's the irony: the President's attacks are energizing the environmental movement in this country like we have not seen in a very long time.

We need to harness that energy to write a bold new conservation vision for the future. A vision that doesn't just undo the Trump administration's attacks – but goes even bigger.

Because if we only reverse the Trump record, it would be like putting a Band-Aid on a life threatening wound.

So let me tell you about my vision. I hope it will become yours.

My vision is three-fold:

First, we must confront climate change with everything we have. And transition quickly to a carbon free economy.

I've introduced a Renewable Electric Standard bill - that gets us to a carbon free energy sector by mid-century. This must be priority number one.

And we should make our public lands pollution free. Fossil fuel emissions from public lands account for almost one-quarter of our CO2 emissions. Instead of being a source of pollution, public lands should be part of the solution.

The West's solar, wind, and geothermal potential is immense on public lands. And on tribal lands.

Not only can tribes fight climate change, but this renewable energy potential translates into tribal energy independence and economic growth.

And it's not just renewable energy. By protecting and restoring our public lands, those lands can absorb greenhouse gas emissions.

But I want to be clear. While we commit to tackling climate change – by transitioning from fossil fuels to clean energy – we must make just as strong a commitment that we will not leave behind communities and workers in the coal and oil and gas industries.

The second pillar of my vision: we must save nature.

Scientists are calling on us to protect 30 percent of our lands and waters by 2030 . . . to save the natural world as we know it. To halt the looming mass extinction.

This fall I introduced the Thirty by Thirty Resolution to Save Nature to officially set this conservation goal for the United States. With your own Senator, Michael Bennet, as my partner.

According to today's poll, 73 percent of the voters support this – and support cuts across party lines. I'm pretty excited about that.

We've been in touch with all the major Democratic presidential candidates and they are all endorsing the 30 by 30 target. Biden, Bloomberg, Buttigieg, Klobuchar, Sanders, and Warren.

You can see the impacts of public support for conservation in the success we are having in Congress with the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

The far right that opposes public lands has tried to eliminate this program for years. The Trump administration wants to terminate it.

But last year we permanently reauthorized LWCF — forever. I helped increase the annual funding to nearly \$500 million dollars — the highest level in 15 years.

And I think there is a real shot to enact permanent, mandatory funding of \$900 million per year in the next 10 months.

We are also making progress on wildlife corridors. States from New Mexico to Wyoming are establishing migration corridors that would boost biodiversity, protect ecosystems, and help safeguard our most iconic species.

I've introduced the Wildlife Corridors Conservation Act to create a corridor network on federal lands and the Tribal Wildlife Corridors Act for tribal lands. We have bipartisan interest and are making progress in upcoming legislation.

These are all ways we can get to Thirty by Thirty.

And the third pillar of my vision is this: As we write our new playbook, environmental justice must be our north star.

Low-income communities, communities of color, and native communities too often bear the consequences of environmental destruction – at the hands of the rich and powerful.

As we transition to a clean energy economy, principles of equity and inclusion must guide our work. No one can be left behind.

Minority, tribal and marginalized communities often bear the brunt of polluted air, poisoned water, and natural disasters.

The environmental movement in the 1960s was overwhelmingly white. The movement today needs to look like America in 2020.

Toward the end of his life, my father wrote a letter to his grandchildren – a letter he called the most important he'd ever written.

His letter was a call to action on climate change and the transition away from fossil fuels.

And he ended the letter – and I will end my remarks – with this quote: “Go well, do well, my children,” he said. “Cherish sunsets, wild creatures and wild places. Have a love affair with the wonder and beauty of the earth.”

Let's listen to my father's plea – and write a new playbook to save the wonder and beauty of the earth, for the benefit of all the earth's people.

Thank you.

Now, I have time for some questions, comments, feedback – and I'd love to hear from you.